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IRISH POEMS OF TODAY

*Chosen from
the first seven volumes of '
The Bell '*

LONDON:

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The 25 poems in this collection have been chosen from about three times the number in the first seven volumes of *THE BELL*. These, in turn, were chosen from many hundreds submitted for publication month by month. They form a small, nearly representative, sample of the valid contemporary English poetry by Irish writers. To make an Irish anthology *fully* representative one should, I think, include work by three other Irish poets whose poems would lend lustre to any pages. I mean Robert Graves, Louis MacNeice, and Austin Clarke. But it has been the policy of *THE BELL* to look rather for poems by young or—at the time when we first printed them—little-known poets. Of these the anthology is certainly representative; though, indeed, Day Lewis was well known before *THE BELL* was ever thought of. Even so, of course, such a collection cannot in the nature of things be comprehensive. Some of the poems are not the very best that their respective authors have written, and I have been obliged to omit poems by poets whose work in general I admire. All editors are restricted by such hazards. None the less, one may look with confidence at the high quality demonstrated amongst this handful of verse taken from the pages of a single magazine over a period of three and a half years.

By the generosity of the printer and of the poets the entire proceeds of sales will go to *THE WRITERS' GUILD BENEVOLENT FUND OF W.A.A.M.A.*

GEOFFREY TAYLOR.

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A Farmer in Hospital

BETWEEN white sheets he lies, a withered leaf,
Between white pages of compressing book.
He, who, at morn, had walked mist-silvered hills,
And felt the soft white dewy wool of sheep,
And shook them free from flesh-consuming pests,
Receiving thankfulness from their mild eyes.
Now, nevermore, his heavy boots shall sink
Into the deep brown earth when he, earth's midwife,
Opens earth's pregnant womb for fruitfulness.
No more on frosty nights with yellow lamp
Swinging from cold red hands
He'll see the warm white breath of sleeping cows
Take ghostly shape among the byre shadows ;
He striding on from cow to cow in dread
Lest pain of calfbirth pierce them unawares,
Lamp lighting glosses on their broad smooth backs.

Nor shall he hear again resounding sound
Of horn and bay of hounds when he, as he
Swings to the motion of the swinging horse,
Blood-lust aflame, all thoughts on one thought bent,
Chases the gaunt red terror-stricken fox.

No more, at dawn, alone in wakefulness,
Striding the fields in quest of lambing sheep,
He'll see the gold brooms of the rising sun
Sweeping the hilltops clear of the nightly dew,
And feel dark surges of unbidden joy
Pour round his heart an ecstasy of pain.

These things are passed. In narrow bed he lies,
Watching through glass a small square patch of blue,
A flick of cloud, pale smoke, and many roofs :
Seeing at times one breathless snatch of green
Beating a moment at his window pane—

The waving of a solitary branch
Uplifted from a solitary tree :
Then turns away his head and feels the ache
Of things remembered, and cold pain of loss,
And pants to know again the cool damp earth,
And seeks a long reunion in the grave.

Margaret Corrigan.

The False Start

Ask it now, if you will, of those who stand
On balconies for the first time in the year.
Ask how they take the tentative approach
Of idle airs that coax the trees to bud
Gently and suddenly, across the road.

Some will confess to blood's uneasiness
At finding the year's curve deflected up
Abruptly, tasting shyly like a beast
The unfamiliar stimulus, each sense
Sharp with suspicion.

Others may let pass
(Being so regularly ground and wound
That nothing strange disturbs them) these mild skies,
The sweetness and the slightness of these winds,
With some stale stock remark that scarcely wakes
The lightly-sleeping echo, lulled so long.

And some remain in whom the lost response
Is found and re-infused by conscious thought.
Double distrust restricts each breath they draw :
The frost's behind them ; and the frost in front
Threatens the shoots they watch, the shoots that push
Their tender spearheads in the long-tilled field,
Bright-pointed thoughts that spring so quick, so bright
That eyes that look direct see only sun.

Anticipation, retrospect, alone
Can dwell upon the lucid interval.
We lack the lithe resilience of the boughs
That bear the flowering blossom to the breeze.
The warmth and liquefaction of our earth
Dissolve, as well, the sense that should respond,
As though the instant blurred our eyes with tears
And clarity of sight could only come
Before they flow, or after they have dried.

Maurice James Craig.

The Frost Was Hard

THE frost was hard those days, the sunlight clean
Each morning on the snow, and every night
Our footsteps rang like iron on the road
As, walking homeward through the misty air,
We kept the mist of breath about us. You
Remember still, thawing the frozen pipes
With cans of boiling water :

To be sure
That frost was hard for you and me ; but now
The long sobs of the dying afternoon
Are caught and choked in autumn's throat. The leaves,
Made fools of by the black heart of the wind,
Skelter along the pathways. In the west
The flickering furnace glows more cold, and there
Beyond the mountains desolately stretch
The bitter marshes under the empty sky.

Where can we find the water now, to thaw
These frozen seas of blood, that superfused
With blood fresh-flowing, congeal about the heart :
The generous impulse in the arteries
That circulate between us, has not flagged
On either side. For that and all it means
My gratitude is inarticulate
And best employed to keep those channels free
Through all the darkness of this winter night.

Maurice James Craig.

The General's Tomb

BETWEEN these mountains and the sea
My lover sleeps. No dreams of me
Disturb the splendid silence of his rest.
His country's banners proudly toss
Above the violets and the moss
That hide the stars of honour on his breast.

I only ask the mountain cot—
What need of fame where pride is not :—
The sunlight glancing on the quiet room.
But an ironic fate has sent
A heart thus humble to be pent
As a last trophy in the warrior's tomb.

Maurice Farley.

The Bird

(i)

A BIRD flew tangent-wise to the open window.
His face was a black face of black unknowing death ;
his eyes threw the grim glint of sharpened stones,
that children pile by unfrequented roads.

And that night, dreaming into a rapture of cardboard life
I started at the lean face of the bird ;
a crow I think it was ; but it was also death :
and sure enough there was the crisp telegram next morning.

I placed my mirror to the flat, unfiltered light,
but the razor cut me, in spite of the guarantee ;
and I knew it was not the razor, but the ebony beak,
that slashed the base of my left nostril.

(ii)

I loved the man who lay in the cheap coffin.
It was he first showed me the damp, stereoscopic fields
of County Down ; and now he was away to farm
the curving acres of his jealous God.

I loved the ploughing of his sun-caught brow,
and the hay-lines and chicken-feathers in his hair,
that was hay itself ; the strongly cobbled boots,
and the swaying, coloured idiom of his mind.

And now he was lying with the Holy Bible under his chin,
sorry only to have died before harvest and turf-cutting :
lying dead in the room of rafters and the gray, stopped
clock—
because of the hatred of the bird I did not kill.

(iii)

Sometimes now, years after, I am nakedly afraid in
mid-winter,
and ashamed to be afraid of an incessant beak,
that raps a symphony of death on the window-panes,
of the window I dare not throw wide open.

But one evening, just before I go to bed to die,
there will be the black face of black unknowing death,
flying past my open window ; there will be the black
bird,
with poison in his beak, and hatred in his wings . . .

Robert Greacen.

The Glens

GROINED by deep glens and walled along the west
by the bare hilltops and the tufted moors,
this rim of arable that ends in foam
has but to drop a leaf or snap a branch
and my hand twitches with the leaping verse
as hazel twig will wrench the straining wrists
for untapped jet that thrusts beneath the sod.

Not these my people, of a vainer faith
and a more violent lineage. My dead
lie in the steeped hillock of Kilmore
in a fat country rich with bloom and fruit.
My days, the busy days I owe the world,
are bound to paved unerring roads and rooms
heavy with talk of politics and art.
I cannot spare more than a common phrase
of crops and weather when I pace these lanes
and pause at hedge gap spying on their skill
so many fences stretch between our minds.

I fear their creed as we have always feared
the lifted hand between the mind and truth.
I know their savage history of wrong
and would at moments lend an eager voice,
if voice avail, to set that tally straight.

And yet no other corner in this land
offers in shape and colour all I need
for sight to torch the mind with living light.

John Hewitt.

Load

TODAY we carted home the last brown sheaf
and hookt the scythe agenst the dry barn wall :
the yellow border's on the chestnut leaf,
the beech leaf's yellow all.

Tomorrow we must bring the apples in,
they are as big as they shall ever be :
already starlings eager to begin
have tasted many a tree.

And in the garden, all the roses done,
the light lies gently, faint and almost cold,
on wither'd goldenrod and snapdragon
and tarnisht marigold.

John Hewitt.

The Hired Lad's Farewell

THE farm boy, only older than myself
by two tann'd years, sigh'd like a grandfather,
shifted his ragged body on the stack,
and pluckt a longer straw. With chin on knees,
I sat not looking at him, gazing out
beyond the limewasht pillars at the yard,
where a late hen that'd stray'd all afternoon,
ran clucking back and scraping round the door.
From the open byre came swish of lazy tails
and noisy breathing till a bucket fell.

Rooks gather'd in the dark elms near the house.
The sun's last crested torch set earth aflame
till stack and hedge were smouldering in a haze.
Tomorrow I'll be going home again. . . .
For two months now Sandy and I had been
close friends and comrades in this country life.
I had learnt much from him. More than I will
ever learn in so short a time. Today
I walk more wisely for the knowledge he gave,
know lore of cow and horse, of crop and root,
that brims my heart up when a screaming train
tears thro green acres from town to smoky town.

He'd learnt from me a scrap or two of verse,
the names of foreign places and strange tribes,
and something of three men who have given life
a richer texture by their simple words,
and how to hold a bat, or toss a lob,
that gave more trouble than my overarm.
We both were chang'd thro meeting with each other.
We would not ever be just quite the same.

Now life became the thing I'd heard men curse,
had us'd us each for each, then sunder'd us.
In three months' time the lad would go to sea,
an older cousin promist that last year . . .
for all his people always went to sea
tho bred in a country place of corn and flax
and early familiar with the ways of cattle.
For their small meadows stumbled to the sea's edge
and broke in cliff and shingle to the waves.
And brine was on the hay the creatures muncht
giving a tang to the milk. They spread brown kelp
over the dug fields at the proper time
and got good crops : as good as any dung ;
while blackhead gulls scream'd in the plowman's wake.

He would go to sea for thirty or forty years
then settle down, a lighthouse-keeper or pilot,
at some lost crumbling cliff-foot round the coast ;
but never again go back to work on the land :
no more to the end than window box of lilies.
It seem'd a foolish thing to lose his wisdom,
hard master'd skill he's spent his boyhood getting,
only to turn his hand to rope and shovel ;
and eat tinn'd pork and biscuit, who knew how
to slit hog's throat, or stack the heavy sheaves.

Tomorrow then I'd sit in the farmer's trap
on label'd box and wave a nervous hand,
while Sandy'd stand peering over the trampled hedge
just where the heifer broke thro yesterday.
And after I'd not see him any more
unless maybe an Indian typhoon
fling me into a bar in Singapore,

or at some quayside walking to the train
I'd catch a glimpse of him thro an open port.
But here we were on the stack's top, very still.
Old Brennan's black bull roar'd. The moyley cow,
That was Jane's pet, low'd quietly back to him.
The shadows of the clms and stacks spread out.
What sun was left shone on the tips of stubble :
a curlew or some other wandering bird
cried from the lough. Far off an engine hooted.

Tomorrow I was going home for good,
and even if I came again next year
he would be gone. I thought of friendly things,
of our antics on the hayfloat, or picking up
hard little windfalls bitter in the mouth,
or scrambling in the rafters after a nest,
or crawling on our bellies after beans,
or whipping up the pony or whacking pigs
till their red buttocks quiver'd as they ran.
But it was useless.

I was going home
And Sandy here was going away to sea.

He never was at best a clever talker,
even with the family round the kitchen table.
At least his eyes were full of comradeship
and pity at the parting. I had been
the first boy to run with him as a friend,
for he'd no brothers or sisters, was an orphan,
and always was a sort of hired lad
out working for his keep to sullen people.

Now he was going away, a hired lad,
indentur'd to the sea till time should end.
And I was going home to a city of brick
to bind myself to a desk and a shelf of books. . . .

The sun set sharp behind the Antrim ridge,
and there was one star over Muldersley Hill.
I shall not be more sad at any death.

John Hewitt.

Poem

ELIZABETH, frigidly stretched,
On a spring day surprised us
With her starched dignity and the quietness
Of her hands, clasping a black cross.

With book and candle and holy-water dish
She received us in the room with the blind down.
Her eyes were peculiarly closed and we knelt shyly
Noticing the blot of her hair on the white pillow.

We met that evening by the crumbling wall
In the field behind the house where I lived
And talked it over but could find no reason
Why she had left us whom she had liked so much.

Death, yes, we understood : something to do
With age and decay, decrepit bodies.
But here was this vigorous one, aloof and prim,
Who would not answer our furtive whispers.

Next morning, hearing the priest call her name,
I fled outside being full of certainty
And cried my seven years against the church's stone-wall.
For eighteen years I did not speak her name

Until this autumn day, when, in a gale,
A sapling fell outside my window, its branches
Rebelliously blotting the lawn's green. Suddenly I
thought
Of Elizabeth, frigidly stretched.

Valentin Iremonger

The Wind

THE tall wind rose and rushed across the land
shouting, shaking with his careless limbs
even the large oak and the lithe long elm,
even the living fortress of the heart.

Under the scud of sky the dry bones sang
out of the lush grave and the lonely wood :
the wind shattered their bright column of words
and flung its jewels in the living hand.

A bone sang how even the living bear
the cloth of flesh for temporary grace,
sang how the smiling or the angry face
is listed in the catalogue of death.

A rib sang how the thoughtless spring had grown
to idle, heavy summer ; and how summer passed
in tears to autumn ; how at last
the tooth of winter bared the grieving bone.

A skull sang how beyond the coil of flesh,
beyond anxiety and the grief of blood,
beyond the bickering and the anger, cool
lands lie, peace ineluctable, and rest.

These words the wild derisive wind let fall
and drove them down with anger ; and the ear
half understood and held them in its care
against the warrior and against the fool.

Sean Jennett.

When from the Calyx-canopy of Night

WHEN from the calyx-canopy of night
The flower of our loveliness unsheathed,
Under the black dew of the darkest hour
The earth dissolved, and everything was void
But this flower's chalice.

Then did the tendrils of my ultimate spirit,
Reaching out delicate antennæ, so to seek
You and be known of you, discover
The inconceivable answer to the unframed question.

And when the petals of the hour of love
Folded to a dove's nest in the feathered dark
Pinioned with silence, and great continents
Rose slowly from penumbral seas of dream,
Then as one dove we soared, and took our flight
Across their shadowy forests into sleep.

Freda Laughton.

The Bombed House

THIS house has lanes not corridors.
Some walls are cliffs, and some,
Whilst drunkenly dancing,
Committed suicide.

One night the inhabitants
Of this corybantic ruin,
One-time desirable residence
Replete with indigestible furniture,

Aroused without warning into death,
Found their bedroom passage
An unsuspected lane leading
Into the unimaginable.

Freda Laughton.

Hornpipe

Now the peak of summer's past, the sky is overcast
And the love we swore would last for an age seems
deceit :

Paler is the guelder since the day we first beheld her
In blush beside the elder drifting sweet, drifting sweet.

Oh quickly they fade—the sunny esplanade,
Speed-boats, wooden spades and the dunes where we've
lain :

Others will be lying amid the sea-pinks sighing
For love to be undying, and they'll sigh in vain.

It's hurrah for each night we have spent our love so
lightly

And never dreamed there might be no more to spend
at all.

It's goodbye to every lover who thinks he'll live in
clover

All his life, for noon is over soon and night-dews fall.

If I could keep you there with the berries in your hair
And your lacy fingers fair as the may, sweet may,
I'd have no heart to do it, for to stay love is to rue it
And the harder we pursue it, the faster it's away.

Cecil Day Lewis.

Columbus

WHAT madness of adventure, what wild blood
Could drive men from the safe home waters
Into these waves, breaking on no shore,
Storms to tear the mountains down
And sun to split the deck beneath our feet :

Through the unbending silence we have come
To this imagined land, this dream's dream,
The lid of the sky from horizon to empty horizon
Shut down on our ships and us, bringing no smell
But the salt smell of the sea, the harsh smell
Of hatred and fear. Hatred and thirst and fear
Tumbled in the brain's cauldron, hatred in dream,
And hatred working beside the man
Whose face and body blotted out the past.

And yet we have our private satisfaction
Who were the first to reach a new possession ;
When we are old, sitting upon the pier
Mending a net, or drinking, in the sun,
We have the story for our grandchildren
Or to astonish the drinkers in the tavern,
Watching their eyes reflecting this new world,
The bright, flower-scattered land,
The golden men and all the indian gold.

Columbus who was a madman, a dream's slave,
A balancer of eggs, a crazy geographer,
Will have great honour, but we, whose hands
Are hard as ropes, whose eyes are blank as stone
From glare of sun on sea, will die, and after
Who will remember how we heard the first seabird,
Saw the first branch covered with budding flowers,
The mist-dimmed mountain beckoning our journey over,
Land reached, sea flood defeated :

Donagh MacDonagh.

Recession

'Tis well,' he said, and he caught his chest,
'Tis very well so ! ' and he coughed and died ;
I turned from him to his seven months' bride,
'Tis well,' she said, as she signed her breast,
'Tis very well so ! God give him rest.'

I crossed the yard and his shirt hung white,
Pegged out square in a windless night,
'And what harm if a button is gone ? ' I thought,
'Tis very well so, for he needs it not.'

Oh, well and well it is for him,
But what of his seven months' bride and me :
To the west three straw-ricks towering dim,
A splintered moon in a leafless tree,
But east is the beat of the homeless sea,
'Tis well, 'tis very well so for him,
But every wave breaks over me !

Patrick MacDonogh.

Plaint of the Working-Men

WHY do you revile us, the unfortunate ones :
Who have lived our lives greyly, without harm,
Without wish or any wanton desire to harm,
Content with our crooked huddle of squinting houses
Where the soot came in, and the roar
Of traffic and gnash of machines was our lullaby ;
Content to live and let live : . . .

Why should the bomb stalk us who are unworthy of
notice
And the sweat-wrung money needed to kill a man :
Whose only vice was a pint and the twopenny pools,
Who tightened our belts in the slumps and went to
the sea
When summer came and we had the railway fare. . .
What are we to the fat old men who rule us :

Only desirous of sleep and sun in the window,
Of sufficient food and tobacco and a drink or two ;
And for us who are young, a girl whose ways are rare
And the trees throwing silent echoes into her eyes. . . .
This, lord and master and factory boss, is our petition,
And though it is worldly and selfish it is all we desire.

Roy McFadden.

The Bone and the Flower

I

WOUND in the seed, the rose's tongue,
Among flowers, the chatter of light and shade,
Lights on the long pier out to sea,
Down there in the valley and on the beach,
Down there in the loam of soil and sea,
Darkness has flowered in the rose,
The bone and the flower are one.

.

Time's gullible shade has penetrated
Mud and matter. Material forms
Disperse. Lion is Greek for Xerxes.
Loam is salt for sea. Under
The towering pyramid and mytho-gothic shades
Darkness has flowered into the shining rose,
The bone of the flower and the power of the bone
Are one rose clipped into the bell of peace.

II

Said the rose to the bone, I am death,
Darkness of love and brightness of flower ;
Said the rose to the bone, I am the breath
Of the mute, infallible hour

When life is the dark rose of flesh
And flesh is the bright flowering bone
And darkness and death are one incontestible mesh
Bound to the seed and the loam,

Gyration of life and bone and flower,
When the voice of the flesh in the darkness of bone
Is the light of the rose in the immemorial hour,
The immemorial hour of the death of the rose and
the bone.

III

I am of light, said the bone
I am the crucial power,
Hardness of rock and stone
Brightness of flame and flower.

I am of fire, said the rose
Born to devour
Brightness of rock and stone
Hardness of flame and flower.

IV

But in the terror, the darkness of the coiled rose
The flowering penultimate power of the unborn rose

But in the dread, the unborn power of the flowering rose
Coiled in the dark flower, the dark power of the unborn
dead.

V

Rose of silence, rose of death
Coiled in the darkness of tongue and breath
Rose of darkness, rose of fire
Coiled in the interminable, indestructible hour !

O paroxysmic power
Inter-cysmic bone of light
Instrumental in the hour
Of dark and dark and light and light !

VI

Dark dark dark the power
 Of unwieldy magnificence in the breath
 Dark dark dark the hour
 Of the intractible and encoiled breath !

Dark dark dark the flower's entanglements
 The virulent rise, the flagellant power
 Dark the hour of the flower's entanglements
 The sibillant rose, the insinuate power !

VII

As the rock to the flesh
 As the bridge to the stream
 Irrevocable the mesh
 Of rock and dream

As the bone to the flower
 As the wall to the garden
 The innocent power
 Of the rose will harden

VIII

Into the squat shape of the flower,
 Into the lumbering rock,
 One rose and reasonable power
 To intone and shock

The liturgy of brain and tower,
 The dark, marmorial shape
 Of the squat flower in the squat brain,
 The dark rose of the ape.

IX

Chaos of shadow and bone and flesh
 Chaos of shadow and bone and rock
 Surmounting the bone and the flesh and the shock
 Wound in the dark irrigatory mesh

Of valley and shadow and stone and rock
 Bound in the round of tower and clock
 Of darkness wound in the heart of light
 Bones on the hillside and bones out of sight

Chaos of rock and tower and hill
 Gyration of bone and flower and rock
 Bones in the valley and bones in the mill
 Bound in the round of tower and clock.

X

I am birth, said the rose
 Seed of decay
 I am light, said the bone
 Born each day.

I am power, said the bone .
 Whiplash and tear
 I am love, said the rose
 Hunger and fear.

I am life, said the bone
 Muscle and blood
 I am death, said the rose
 Fire and flood.

XI

One light, one light, in bone and flower,
 One periphrastic, impenetrable power,
 One dark successive light, one weave
 Of bone and flesh, one mute intolerable hour
 When all is none, and all is power

And the violence of the rose, and all
 The saintly flower, concupiscent with death,
 The flowering bone, the flowering breath
 In labour, one shape and season,
 Rose of extinction and rebirth.

XII

So the rose and the bone were united in the dark peace
 of death
 And the dark shadow of the rock and the flesh was
 forever erased
 And the memory of man once more took on the
 character of its birth
 In the light of the testimony of the flesh, in the light of
 the bone, in the light of the indestructible rose.

Nick Nicholls.

Exile Song of Colmcille

Dá mba liom Alba uile

IF I owned Alba over,
from lough through trossach out to sea-lough,
I'd beg lease of a house-holding
cut of the sod of Derry.

Warm my wish for Derry,
Derry's smooth, Derry's airy,
angels unnumbered move
through Derry's dun and azure.

There is not leaf, bud, or blade
in lawny Derry unarrayed
with twin faultless angels
like twin wicks of radiance.

God has not found on the land
room for the broods of angels—
for nine billows beyond
Derry are eagle faces. ..

My Derry ! my coppices !
cloister of my orisons !
High God who fillest Heaven
pity who fouls my haven !

Delightful O delightful
red seas with the strident seagulls
to speak to me from Derry afar—
'tis easeful, it is delightful.

Foyle-lough is filled with gull-wings
in front of me and after—
but none to my gunwale clings
to smother parting.

The cry of Eoghan, Conall's cry
rising from the Foyle-lough side
with my own mournful sigh
mix, with the groan of the tide.

Leaving my kith and kin
I give hint of my hurt :
nightly swift tears shall swim
over my lids from my heart.

I am come of the Irish—
the Irish taught me—
it has come of the Irish
that churls mocked me,
yet, sundering from the Irish—
to their way my way tended—
little loss if I perish
in a night, unbefriended.

An eye of gray
rivets Ireland far away.
'Never, never see again
Ireland's womenfolk or men.'

At dawn and at dusk weeping
uch, uch, and from her creeping !
My name (tell the secret to men !)
is 'Ireland behind him.'

Take a blessing with you west,
my heart is withered in my breast.
If to death I descend
passion for the Irish wrought my end.

Roibéard Ó Farachdín.

·Caoineadh Ar Sheàn

(A Cry for John)

O STRONG was the wood in the ashen oar,
And strong was the heart of Sean its rower,
And strong was the boat as she skimmed the tide,
And strong were the thowl-pins fixed in her side ;
Strong, strong, strong !

But strong was the wave that broke the oar,
That stopped the heart of Sean its rower,
That sunk the boat as she skimmed the tide,
That smashed the thowl-pins fixed in her side ;
Strong, strong, strong !

D. J. O'Sullivan.

Drinking Time

Two black heifers and a red
Standing on the river-bed,
Filling up their belly-tanks,
Water swirling 'round their flanks.

In the stirred-up river mud
Elvers wriggle, flat-fish scud ;
Where the torrent's slow and deep
Sea-bound smolt lie half-asleep.

Buzzing flies bite bovine flesh,
Twitching tails make rainbow-splash,
One black sucks a tadpole in,
Sniffs and snorts create a din.

Now the farmer's voice is heard
Above the cymbal-tinkling ford,
'Bramble, Bluebell, Buttercup ;
Hi, come out, come, cow-up !'

In answer to the urging call
They leave for shelter'd byre stall,
Oaten mash and hay-strewn bed,
Two black heifers and a red.

D. J. O'Sullivan.

Ireland

O THESE lakes and all gills that live in them,
These acres and all legs that walk on them,
These tall winds and all wings that cling to them,
Are part and parcel of me, bit and bundle,
Thumb and thimble. Them I am, but none more
Than the mountains of Mourne that turn and trundle
Roundly like slow coils of oil along the shore
Of Down and on inland. When I begin
To draw my memory's nets and outlines in,
Then through its measured mesh escapes the fuss
And fluster of all the finicky things.
Of the Mournes I remember most the mist,
The grey granite goose fleshed, the minute
And blazing parachutes of fuchsia, and us
Listening to the tiny clustered clinks
Of little chisels tinkling tirelessly
On stone, like the drip of birds' beaks picking
Rapidly at scattered grain. I think of those
Wet sodden days when we, for miles and miles,
Steadily padded the slow sponge of turf
That squealed and squelched cold between our bared
toes ;
Or on airy ridge, urgent and agile, ran,
A chain of jiggling figures on the skyline ;
Or, skilfully in file, followed, tricking
The hoops of hairy bramble in our path,
Poking in undergrowth and picking
The bitter berries that prickle the springs
Of the dark mouth. There was Bloody River
Where the granite pickles bristled and blazed, and
Ebullient water bellied over

Boulders with the sweep of a bell's shoulders,
And pancaked out in pools. Drinihilla
Where the gales smoothed and glued back the eye-lids.
The granite river that is called Kilkeel,
Whose beds were clean and gritty like oatmeal :
And Commedagh in whose high summer heat
Nothing stirred, only the shimmering bleat
Of sheep ; and we, as we sat and chattered,
Marked the motionless shine of falls far-off
On Binyon, and nothing at all mattered :
And Legawherry so soft and grassy,
Where the white scuts lazily scattered,
And never in their remotest burrows
Did ferret-fear come fiercely after them :
Slieve-na-brock and its long pig-tail trickles
That hung down the bald rocks, reaching to
The glossy backs of the bracken. And Donard
Where, high over all hanging, the strong hawk
Held in his eyes whole kingdoms, sources, seas,
And in his foot-hooks felt all things wriggling
Like the single string of river niggling
Among the enormous mountain-bottoms.
Bearnagh and Lamigan and Chimney-Rock,
Spelga, Pulgrave, and Cove—all these names lie
Silently in my grass-grown memory,
Each one bright and steady as a frog's eye ;
But touch it and it leaps, leaps like a bead
Of mercury that breaks and scatters
Suddenly in a thousand shining strings
And running spools and ever-dwindling rings
Round the mind's bowl, till at last all drop
Lumped and leaden again to one full stop.

W. R. Rodgers.

Poem

FROM my wind-blown book I look
Up and see the lazy rook
Rise and twist away,
And from every airy eave
The arrowy swallows wildly leave
And swoop as if in play.

Dark the daw with claw-wing sail
Swings at anchor in the gale,
And in the running grass
Daffodils nod and intervene
Like sud-flecks on a sea of green
Dissolving as they pass.

Mouldy and old the bouldered walls
Wake in the sun and warm their polls
And wag aubretia beards,
The snail-glaze of senility
Silvers each front, and backward they
Break wind and dree their weirds.

Bosoms of bloom that sob like moss
Beneath each jumpy breath, emboss
The bony orchard's breast ;
And look, the leggy lilac-canes
Are varicosed with ivy veins
Of gravy coalesced.

There the hare, bound after bound,
Concertinas all the ground
As far as eye can spy it,
Like a fountain's dying spray
It falls in little frills away
Into a twitching quiet.

Still down the slow opposing slope
The intent ploughman draws his rope
Of parsimony fine,
Nor notices Icarus in his haste
Expend his spirit in a waste
Of aerobic wine.

Icarus from his heady plane
Into depths of spinning brain
Bales out like a ball,
Pulls the ripcord, splits the sack
And lets the spilled silk splutter back
And speculative fall.

And hark, the lark sarcastic sings
To Icarus without his wings
Dawdling down the sky,
Indolent aeons have gone to make.
Its gimlet bill, its song-gills' shake,
Its all-containing cry.

W. R. Rodgers.

The Party

So they went, leaving a picnic-litter of talk
And broken glitter of jokes, the burst bags of spite :
In comes Contempt the caretaker, eye on ceiling,
Broom in armpit, and with one wide careless cast
Sweeps the stuttering rubbish out of memory,
Opens the shutters, puts out the intimate lamp,
And, a moment, gazes on the mute enormities
Of distant dawn. And far doors bang in mind, idly.

W. R. Rodgers.

Boat-Haven, Co. Mayo

THAT house, a stone's throw from the shell-strewn shore,
Now nearly swallowed by encroaching trees
That creep upon it from the hill behind,
Itself a shell like any of these, gaping
And broken but still beautiful, was built
By Smuggler Jordan in seventeen-twenty or so.

Gable and wings toward the crumpled sea,
With vacant door and window, yet look out
Through unkempt hair of overgrowth—the door
And lower windows all but blocked by nettles—
In the spare sunlight and tart air of autumn.
What once were lawns remain like lawn, kept clipt
By sandhill-warren'd rabbits, to high tide ;
While of the garden, one exotic fig-tree
Still struggles strangled by black-fruited brambles.

Then who on earth was Jordan ? I don't know.
Only his name survives among the peasantry.
English perhaps, a bit rough-tongued no doubt ;
He may have had a palate for French wine
Or brandy landed on this awkward coast
Too intricate for revenue men to watch ;
But he had certainly an eye for building,
Or else employed an architect who had.

So, granted an eye for a right elevation,
A nice taste, too, in moulding and stuccoed brick,
Let me suppose he judged a face and figure,
Manner and heart, with justice ; had in fact
A wife who'd grace the landscape and the house ;
Who'd read Matt Prior and not forget her prayers ;
Cold-curved, demure, and coyly courteous
At picnics or when company would dine ;

Coiled and familiar in her feather bed ;
High-breasted and bright-eyed—a girl for whom
It might have been delight, with contraband
Of coarser kind, to land French silks and ribands.

One idly speculates, because one must
People a place—if only to complete
The picture for a sentiment.

However,
Now all that's left after two hundred years—
A name and this façade that keeps a name
Still faintly in men's memory—will go ;
For there's enough cut stone in coping and lintel
Still to call forth a natural cupidity
In any native who 's a byre to build.

Geoffrey Taylor.

For M—

It is not easy to be less than lovers,
I think it is simpler far
To catch the wind's bridle,
Thrust up and ride between the cheering trees
Bank upon bank of leafy throatiness,
Fulfilling once again
What the sun has promised for us
Of partnership and pain.
Each year attends our downfall
And yet does something more
Than shift a subsoil
Grant an acre less
To this poor family.
The nursery's kingdom now stands out of doors
The gollywog reigns in terror on the hill
And shakes his startled locks against the sky.
Now is the time to thank
Our stars for their exciting twist and curl.
Though drunken in their cradles
They dare better
To settle finally for ever
What cut our veins and jerked our feet away.

Should the hawk and the oyster mate
Surprise would not halt us,
The slighting and chiding of lovers
Call no correction.
We know too well that those in partnership
Break down each other's health.
Why should we die this way,
Tense as a drill of light on the open sea,
We who had ankles and poise

And fists to crack nuts in,
We who as children understood cruelty :
Long ago in a big house they danced
And pair by pair they left me.
But the woman I could not touch
Stayed by the fire.
Oh, when at last I slept,
Who was I to know
She was the only one who kept
Her promise and her way of speaking.
This is my question : Was she the one
Who ran, her head above the cornstalks, laughing,
When she was twelve :
Who said : Is it true we must bear it,
This vast undoing of hate :
Yes, then as children
We must have teased and chattered in the sun.
The drift and catch of the wind
Came to us easily
Came to us then.

Bruce Williamson.

